

Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Opening Statement
Workforce, Employment, Labor and National Service Hearing
Minnesota State Capitol
March 8, 2010

Good morning.

I want to thank everyone who is in attendance today and of course all of our witnesses. Your participation and testimony is greatly appreciated.

Congress has started work on President Obama's fiscal year 2011 federal budget. As a member of the House Budget Committee and the House Appropriations Committee, I have the responsibility to make sure that Congress is making smart, effective, and sustainable investments with your tax dollars. With our nation's economy struggling to recover and far too many Americans out of work and searching to find jobs Washington needs to make sound investments that help to put America back to work.

At the same time we all know that the federal fiscal condition is one of deep deficits. This is the direct result of the recession's negative impact on revenues and the significant federal investments that have been made to prevent an economic depression, save jobs, and establish the foundation for an economic recovery. We don't have federal dollars to waste so I am determined to make the fiscal year 2011 budget work as effectively as possible for Minnesota and families across our country.

As most of you know I am a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies. The subcommittee's jurisdiction is expansive and critical to economic competitiveness, community health, and the safety and well-being of our society's most vulnerable children, adults and seniors. In fiscal year 2010 this subcommittee enacted \$163 billion in budgetary authority for some of the most important and effective domestic federal programs.

Today's hearing kicks off what will be a series of hearings over the next two months to receive testimony from community and state leaders about the federal programs that are making a difference in the lives of the residents of Minnesota. Today I will focus on workforce development, employment services, labor protections, and our national service programs.

Future hearings will concentrate on federal programs to strengthen our healthcare security for Americans, the safety net programs that protect our most vulnerable citizens, and educational investments that will keep our country globally competitive, including early childhood, K-12, and post-secondary education.

For most Americans - including me - the number one issue facing our nation is economic recovery and job creation. We need jobs to be created and we need a skilled workforce to fill the needs of our 21st Century economy. With a national unemployment rate of 9.7 percent there are millions of unemployed American who are ready to return to the workforce. There are also around 100,000 new workers entering the workforce every month who are also competing for jobs.

Training, skills building, and workforce development programs need to assist dislocated workers and young people for the employment opportunities that will emerge on the other side of this recession. I have visited many of the excellent education and training programs that exist in my district seen the impact of federal dollars in the lives of our fellow citizens. We are in a new environment now and I am interested in hearing today how providers of workforce training are adapting to meet the challenges of a very difficult job market.

The Department of Labor funds numerous activities that protect the rights, health and safety of workers across this country. The effective enforcement of labor standards and regulations ensuring workplace safety is always important. I believe success in this area is not only a matter of having sufficient resources for enforcement, but also requires the political will on the part of the executive branch protect workers' rights. This is even more critical when labor is abundant and there is an economic incentive by some employers to cut corners.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today from both organized labor and the private sector on this issue.

Finally, tens of thousands of Americans, both young adults and seniors, are serving our country and our communities by committing themselves to national service. The Corporation for National and Community Service is funded by the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Subcommittee and President Obama is recommending a significant increase in funding for community service.

Not only does service build valuable life-long skills for the participants, but those Americans committing themselves to service also contribute to improving communities, our natural environment, and the lives of individuals in need.

The fiscal year 2011 budget proposes to distribute federal funds to every state and every community of this country. Everyone testifying here today has experience and expertise working with federally funded programs. What I want to know today is how can federal funds in the area of workforce development, employment services, labor enforcement, and national service best benefit Minnesota? What programs are working or not working? And do you have recommendations for making them work better? Are the funds requested by President Obama going to improve the lives of the Minnesotans they are intended to benefit?

Again, I would like to thank each and every one of you for joining me today. I look forward to hearing the testimony of the four panels of witness we have with us.

Now, I would like to start with the "Government Panel" of witness from the State of Minnesota, Ramsey County, Dakota County, and MNSCU.